

## COLOMBIAN ARMY TRANSFORMATION AND THE INFLECTION POINT OF THE TERRORIST GROUPS

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**COLOMBIAN ARMY TRANSFORMATION AND THE INFLECTION POINT OF THE  
TERRORIST GROUPS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The transformation process developed by the Colombian Army for its different structural components between the years 1998 and 2002 provides the fundamental basis for defeating terrorism, and producing a power imbalance in favor of the State. The Colombian Army knew that the challenges and threats were more and more difficult to address, and that the only way to advance was by integrating the following:

Enhanced flexibility to meet a changing and competitive environment; new technology with improved capabilities and challenges; improved skills and doctrine; teamwork; integrated strategic, operational and support processes; logistics support, training, and counterinsurgency doctrine; and a new renewal concept of Integral Action. With the transformation process almost done, now the commitment is to achieve the objectives of the Defense Policy and democratic security.





## COLOMBIAN ARMY TRANSFORMATION AND THE INFLECTION POINT OF THE TERRORIST GROUPS

It is undoubtedly of great importance for Colombia and for the international community to demonstrate how the transformation process developed by the Colombian Army to reform its structural components between the years 1998 and 2002 set the conditions for initiating the defeat of terrorism, thereby producing a power imbalance in favor of the State. The current results, founded in legitimacy and transparency, represent a model of success for the world.

The following are the specific objectives of this project:

- To demonstrate how the Colombian Army was transformed during a period of significant political turmoil to defeat terrorism.
- To identify the leadership role and the value of the change process in two ways: as a permanent condition of our environment and as a process to achieve legitimacy, thereby increasing the Government's credibility over the last 12 years.
- To analyze the modernization work conducted by Colombian intelligence and its influence in successful operational results.
- To identify how the Colombian Army became one of the best armies in the world, achieving high levels of education, training, and professionalism.

As it was enunciated above, it is important for national and international communities to know the successful process of transformation undertaken by the Colombian Army in a climate of uncertainty, achieving significant improvements in following comprehensive reform throughout the force.

Indeed, the modifications introduced in personnel, intelligence, operations, integral action, logistics, education and doctrine areas, dictated that this powerful State's apparatus would become an intelligent power. An effective Army therefore

provides an efficient, offensive, deterrent on its borders, as well as incorporating legitimate, professional, modern, and innovation processes that have become the permanent axis of improving culture, quality and excellence. This successful process of transformation may be demonstrated concretely in the most successful operations in the strategic process of initiating threat decline.

It is important for military history to develop an analysis of how the strengthening of structural capacities, function of equipment and means, united to conduct modification centered in leadership and values, permits putting at the disposal of a country a land power able to face narco-terrorist organizations with success.

### The Problem

It is known that crisis usually generates opportunities. During crises, great opportunities present themselves for taking action, sometimes painful but necessary. The most difficult decisions to make are those involving innovation and transformation of an institution's way to develop activities and operations. Sometimes changes are seen as a threat. "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."<sup>1</sup>

The military, which manages higher risk levels in the development of daily activities, is more prone to expressing rejection to change. This may be due to the high uncertainty regularly encountered. However, it is demonstrated here that change must be faced and the breaking of paradigms usually accepted when it is discovered during task development that the traditional way of creating solutions is not working.

For the Colombian Army, the crisis unleashed by the series of previous defeats occurred in the 1996 - 1998 period, left no other alternative than restructuring or

allowing the terrorist groups to advance to their next phase of action. Indeed, the FARC's (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) escalated offensive took the Colombian Army by surprise despite various analysts predicting that the guerillas would advance to a new phase of the conflict characterized by massive attacks and tactical offensive movement. The FARC struck hard and this caused contemplation of the outcome of the war both nationally and internationally.

To overcome the serious crisis the FARC offensive was generating, the relevant militaries, with professional advice, diagnosed the need for making changes in technology, organization, doctrine, mental attitude and values. That is why the Colombian Army required innovation amid crisis and in particular amid war, making an analysis of the nature of the enemy. It needed to rethink its doctrine, because if not it could represent a higher danger. If we add to these imperatives that during war mistakes or lack of coordination may mean defeat in battle, then high costs in military, political, social, and economic fields will result.

### Background

As stated above, crisis generates opportunities, so to address the transformation process necessarily implies the worst military crisis in Colombia's recent history. At that time, some institutions of the country and also some citizens contemplated the possibility that the terrorists were near to defeating the military forces. Even though defeat was never imminent, the FARC managed to escalate the conflict to levels never seen before, crisis that generated the most successful change process in any Latin army.

Many national and international pundits wondered why the Colombian State could not defeat the armed groups operating outside the law in almost four decades of

armed confrontation, but to understand why this did not happen, it is fair to recognize briefly its evolution and the public policy surrounding it. Along the years, the FARC and the ELN (National Liberation Army) stated long term growth and consolidation strategies as the means to reach their strategic objectives with tactical and operational flexibility; regrettably the State did not establish a security policy that could face adverse and variable threats. On the contrary, different positions appeared every four years with the change of government, but there was no clear communication guideline.

The State faced the challenge by dividing it into three stages: the first, a total confrontation conducted with the implementation of Plan Laso which started in the 1960s and terminated in 1965; the second included an almost absolute ignorance of the challenge, until President Belisario Betancourt was elected in 1982; and the last, the disqualification and underestimation of the threat since 1982 until the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, there was no strategy aimed at the total neutralization of the threat, but on the contrary, there was a strategy aimed at negotiating with the narco-terrorists for a lasting peace agreement. The closest to a winning strategy was the national strategy against violence instituted by President Gaviria in 1990-1994, that despite being well articulated was not fully implemented. Among other reasons, but mostly because the efforts were oriented toward the threat represented by Medellin's Cartel, in particular Pablo Escobar, as the number one public enemy. Neither the administration of President Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) nor that of President Andrés Pastrana (1998 – 2002), produced a National Security Strategy of any value.<sup>3</sup> However, from the beginning of President Alvaro Uribe's administration (2002 – 2006), the previous chain of inaction has been clearly broken. For the first time in 20 years, security constitutes

the main focus of public policy and represents the main purpose of the government's agenda.

Before the absence of policies to face the challenge of guerrilla groups, there was an especially suitable stage that permitted the FARC's military, political and economical expansion. Unlike other groups such as "Sendero Luminoso" in Peru or the "HUKs" in Philippines, the FARC suffered the somnolence or freezing effect for nearly 22 years; in the 1980s, however, they entered a growing stage, increasing much more in effectiveness and territorially expansion.<sup>4</sup> They passed from having less than 260 men in the 1960s to 3,600 in 1985, to 7,000 in 1995 and near 20,000 in 2001.<sup>5</sup> In the Seventh Conference held on 14 May 1982, a strategic plan was adopted to seize power and defining the Oriental mountains as the axis of the strategic deployment and the capital of the Republic as center of this axis.<sup>6</sup> These changes meant passing from dispersed actions to ones with political-strategic projection. Their plan consisted in locating 12 guerrilla fronts in the Cordillera, for a total of 49 fronts and a force of nearly 32,000 armed men.<sup>7</sup> The organization became a systematic and effective institution by charging taxes for coca cultivation, processing ingredients, using clandestine airstrips, and operating laboratories and criminal infrastructure. These initiatives allowed their control of all the processes of the cultivation, production and distribution of cocaine and heroin around the world. With that they were strengthened militarily, politically and logistically; moreover their financing, coming directly from kidnapping and extortion of citizens and multinational companies, also provided significant means.

Their financial capacity and the clarity of their purposes permitted a dramatic improvement in their combat capabilities as dictated in the insurgent model of

Protracted Popular War of Mao Tse Tung. Protracted War includes steps towards revolution carried out in phases. In a practical way it can be stated in words of General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, president of the Republic of Uganda, that even though in Colombia there were not the basic conditions for the same type of war, it was continued in all its forms and activities.<sup>8</sup> For example, he states that the Protracted Popular War is a strategic instrument in the hands of the oppressed people against the oppressor, either local or external. It is a means to change a situation radically. But this is only possible under certain conditions, which have never occurred in Colombia. On the contrary, lacking a history of oppression, Colombia enjoys one of the most respected democracies, with liberties and individual and collective rights. Political support is increasingly significant from the people of the country. Only a small group of Colombians are observed working in favor of some of terrorist interests. Currently, less than a 1% of the population is accompanying the terrorist armed struggle.<sup>9</sup>

But the narco-terrorist organizations practice all the phases to the letter: agitation, infiltration in local social institutions, the occasional use of terrorism, and the construction of support bases based on indoctrination and intimidation of the population. The denominated War of Guerrillas remains. In the second phase, small units make sporadic attacks on military and police units to surprise them through ambushes and traps to the public force to obtain arms, cause chaos, and give the impression of strength. They face bigger military units in open combat; this is a denominated War of Movements. The FARC reached this phase at the beginning of 1996; their tactical, technological and organizational innovations, coupled with financial gains from narco-

traffic, yielded the highest military results in their history. They implemented a New Way to Operate (NFO).<sup>10</sup>

This NFO was practiced in 1996 and 1998. This was the darkest period of the Colombian Army's history. Over these two years, the FARC nearly broke the will of the country and obtained their strategic objective of defeating the military and taking power through arms. A Gallup survey in 1998 showed that only 34% of the people believed in the ability of the Army to defeat the guerrillas and 60% did not believe the Army would prevail.<sup>11</sup>

The FARC's offensive started on 15 April 1998 when Front 48 attacked a military convoy in Puerres (Nariño), assassinating 31 soldiers. Also between 30 August and 1 September of the same year, the military base at Las Delicias was totally destroyed. On this occasion, a company of regular soldiers – a unit comprised of conscripts – was totally surrounded by FARC guerrillas and destroyed; 54 soldiers were killed, 17 wounded and 60 kidnapped (some of which are still in the hands of the terrorist group). After fifteen hours of combat in which it was not possible to provide reinforcements or aerial support, the military surrendered when ammunition was exhausted and the only alternative was death.<sup>12</sup>

The disaster continued on 7 September, only one week after the Las Delicias attack. The FARC attacked Mobile Brigade 2 near La Carpa in San Jose del Guaviare—30 soldiers died. On 21 December 1997, the FARC attacked a military base located in the department of Nariño; eight soldiers died and 18 were kidnapped. According to the newspaper El Tiempo, this action “evidenced an absolute lack of coordination, planning and prevision before an attack that was announced one month before.”<sup>13</sup>

The most serious military setback resulting from the FARC's offensive occurred on 3 March 1998. Counter-guerrilla Battalion No. 52, from the newly created Mobile Brigade No. 3 (an elite unit composed of professional soldiers, highly trained for counter-guerrilla combat), was ambushed near the ravine El Billar, Caquetá and was practically annihilated: 62 soldiers died and 43 became prisoners of the FARC. This setback was disturbing as the FARC had demonstrated combat capacity and tactical ability, as well as operational planning. As it was expressed by security analyst Alfredo Rangel in an opinion column published days after the attack: "The facts of Caquetá show the dimension of the military threat FARC represents for the State and the vulnerability degree of the Military Forces."<sup>14</sup> Further expanding this point, he wrote: "What has happened there is very significant for being this an open combat, in an important scale, between elite groups from the army as well as from the guerrilla: professional soldiers from a mobile brigade and the most seasoned guerrillas from FARC's south block. Unlike to what happened in Las Delicias, a forgotten and marginal base, conformed by recruits, this was an advanced base, in a combat area, with experienced soldiers. The forcefulness of the disastrous result of this force pulse evidences the military situation of both sides."<sup>15</sup>

In November 1998, FARC forces took Mitú, the capital of the department of Vaupés. Significantly, this attack was anticipated; three weeks before, two journalists from the newspaper El Tiempo visited the department's capital and a Police lieutenant informed them that rumors persisted and have increased, but that everything was ready to repel any action by the FARC. This capture demonstrated that the FARC were able to seize a department's capital, with the natural psychological impact this carries. Also, the



guerrilla strategy always aimed at dispersing and diluting the State's military responses, attacking peripheral targets away from the nation's nucleus.<sup>16</sup>

The alert and alarm voices were immediate; for example, the Defense ex-Minister, Rafael Pardo, said "that the unconcealed inefficiencies came from the State's direction and that the Military Forces are instruments of the government policies, erratic today".<sup>17</sup> Also the main newspapers and magazines editorials reflected the serious crisis and their unconcealed preoccupation for the inefficiency of the State apparatus to control it. For example El Tiempo stated that, "it hurts too much to ask the generals for accounts who dedicate their life to the defense of Colombia but it is more painful to see how the number of dead soldiers grows, the failures must be investigated and of course remedied."<sup>18</sup>

### The Transformation Challenge

This attitude evolved with the new military leadership and the arrival of the Defense Ministry Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo. They, to tell the truth, achieved the rescue of the institution. The group leaders, Generals Fernando Tapias commanding the Military Forces and Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel commanding the Army, basically looked to institutional transformation and the restoration of public order as an offensive mentality, focused on winning the war.<sup>19</sup> The first objectives were to recover troop morale, restructure the institution and retake the initiative. A group of officers constituted the catalyst for the change, chosen for their reputation among the troops, their recognized capacities on the battle field, and their steadfast integrity.<sup>20</sup>

Innumerable diagnosis were performed, the main weakness was the lack of preparation for an offensive, with serious failures in strategic, technical and combat intelligence. Failures in mobility, isolation from the civil population, and inability to

provide close air support were also documented. Colombia was decertified by the United States and this produced serious international isolation for the country. It was established for example that the responsibility of the military crisis lay on the President who “has in very difficult moments looked for the support of the Public Force for political effects, leaving the Military Forces weakened on their command, support and direction.”<sup>21</sup>

It is now observed that the model used by the Colombian Army for its transformation greatly resembles that followed by the United States Army; a return to values, people, the sense of mutual commitment and an ethos of service to the Nation. This design produced a vision for transformation, defining today’s and tomorrow’s Army together with the values required as a fundamental basis for change. The Army’s transformation should be achieved through action, with leaders that thought and acted according to a purpose to show the way to the future so people could understand it and continue to support it. New doctrine focused on refining the Army’s culture constituted a significant change; namely a collective understanding on Colombian Forces should combat and lead operations, because the rigors of conflict, the limits of violence, and the political, social and military situation predicted a horizon of dark clouds that impeded looking at the future with hope.

*A Comprehensive Modernization Strategy* provided the strategic architecture for change. The Colombian Army knew that the challenges and threats were more and more difficult to contain, and that the only way to advance was with complete conscience of implementing each of the following imperatives: adapting to the fast change of the operational environment, fielding new technology with new opportunities

and challenges, and the need to improve tactical doctrine. These initiatives provided a process centered on the most important asset, the troops.

Building a flexible Army should come first, not only in war but in addressing any kind of mission. A scheme had to be identified within the transformation process where the traditional mission was assumed. New tasks and new missions had to be characterized without losing sight of traditional principles and values. These principles are founded in the historic defense and preservation of democracy and sovereignty.

All this had to be accomplished while gauging the impact on the minds of personnel and the Colombian people; the basis of the strategy was to create an enhanced Army for the future that will not fail the Colombian people in the combat arena. In synthesis, it was never forgotten that the Army provided the fundamental basis of democracy and of the dreams of our compatriots. Their fundamental role in history is defending rights and liberties, without distinction of race, sex, culture and social condition. Once this imperative was recognized, it was not difficult to gather capacity and instill renewed institutional values. The deep systemic process must also be highlighted– criticism emerged, not for imposition but for a true conviction-working efficiently for the Colombian people has granted the solution for the war waged against the armed illegal groups.

Basic questions were raised: what were we making, what were we not making and how could we influence the perception of legitimacy on the national and international level and the commitment of Army members to Colombia. This change in attitude was founded on an institutional basis to strengthen strategic leadership; namely, the capacity to direct and control the rational and deliberate change in all levels

of the institution, as well as create future capacity to survive tomorrow's uncertainty. This should be a process based on values, oriented by a vision, guided by the strategy, ingrained by the institution's critical processes, matured with structured knowledge but always impelling, growing and learning. In this way, modernization became the most important national project for the Colombians. It was not only a structural change, but the adaption to modern values in terms of the Army's role in a State of democratic rights.

A conscious statement of quality, the commitment to write a new doctrine, train and develop new leaders started to develop. To apply this doctrine with a new technology and a new focus that was extended to redesigning tactical units. In this way, the change would happen first in the personnel's mind and then in the structures, the processes, and in doctrine. For no reason was intellectual work avoided. It was necessary to understand overall what was going to be performed and how it was going to be performed, namely the recognition of what was known and not known about the operating environment. The process was started thanks to the process of thinking and doing. Therefore the vision was identified, with the participation of all the command levels. This was hard work from basic to high command and from this to the smallest units. The vision provided the direction and the advance capacity in a simple way, so it would be understood and assimilated by all Army personnel.

Strategic alignment linked values and vision to the processes of the institution, keeping in mind not just planning but action as well. The values made for acceptable limits. It was clear nothing was more important than this, as a well articulated concept

and a clear purpose. In the military the concept and the purpose must be stated clearly and unequivocally, and then must be emphasized again and again.<sup>22</sup>

Within this change process, the following vision and mission were established for the Colombian army:

#### Mission

The National Army develops military operations to defend and maintain the sovereignty, the independence and territorial integrity, with the purpose of generating a peace, security and development environment that guarantees the Nation's constitutional order.<sup>23</sup>

#### Vision

It is projected as a modern Army, professional, organized and trained. An Army victorious in combat and prepared for peace, strengthened on its values, integrated to the Nation's development that successfully overcomes the XXI century.<sup>24</sup>

To the above was established the process guiding objective, **"To win the war and construct the future army,"** a victorious army able to answer the country's operative needs, with professionalism and forcefulness, in any of the stages where it is called on to perform.<sup>25</sup> This was established for an army whose main premise was not to fail the Colombian people in the combat field.

As it is logical to realize this purpose demanded changes at all levels, the officers, non commissioned officers, soldiers and civil personnel had to be absolutely committed. This architectural change began at the most basic level. The army's restructuration became the number one objective of the institution and started with a mental attitude change, leaving aside routine, overconfidence and old procedures. Change was the only constant, addressed by leaders with moral authority, experience and commitment that generated contagious wellness and were able to make their men follow them even to death if necessary. It was clear that to win the war we should

reduce, eliminate and destroy the enemy's will with an operative attitude characterized by agility, initiative, tactical and strategic sense, and excellent maneuver and forcefulness; such actions would cancel the false concept based on numeric superiority of troops and units. An offensive mentality and forcefulness in maneuver would produce victory on the battlefield.

Looking for successful consolidation, for the first time a Campaign Plan was designed to reduce the armed capacity and the will to fight and damage the attitude of the narco-terrorist organizations. The center of gravity was in restoring governmental legitimacy, namely the credibility generated by the absolute respect for law and valid norms. The product of actions was based in principles and values. To this was added the acts congruent with strengthening the strategic planning systems, self-management and self-control.

#### Modernization and Terrorism's Strategic Inflection Point

The most important consequence of the transformation process was that the FARC's offensive was restrained, which was evident in operations such as Puerto Rico and Puerto Lleras in the department of Meta, where the insurgents suffered hundreds of casualties. Due to the aerial superiority that granted a significant tactical advantage to the Military Forces, the insurgent groups readapted their operational mentality, abandoning the massive guerrilla movements, which were easy to target for helicopters and combat airplanes; as a result, the FARC returned to their traditional operations, including ambush attacks with small units, harassment of the public, and attacks on municipalities and police stations. The FARC reverted their operations to those typical of the phase – guerrilla war – temporarily renouncing the movement war, at least while they developed anti-aerial capacities necessary to face the “new” Colombian military

forces. This is exactly what “Farabundo Martí” front for National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador developed to face the Salvadorian Army when they achieved a significant aerial capacity.<sup>26</sup>

Transformation has yielded a much improved Colombian Army, highly mobile and flexible, composed of motivated personnel, identified with the struggle and with a historical challenge that corresponds to overcoming it. The Army is led by leaders that skillfully manage development and human elements, thereby empowering the minds and hearts of the men they command. The Army has institutionalized its new operational concept, based on increasing combat power, the optimization of strategic intelligence, improved doctrine, and combat support systems. This is a force supported in its institutional culture, centered in the respect to persons, the exercise of leadership, upholding principles and values, and the weakening of armed groups operating outside the law. Today’s Army is an army with a high level of legitimacy; its focus is the security and tranquility of the Colombian people, not only because it fulfills its constitutional duties, but because it is the defender of rights and public liberties (an aspect that is demonstrated by an 88% reduction of complaints about human rights violations against members of the Institution).<sup>27</sup>

The success of the modernization process was measured by the containment of the FARC’s offensive, as demonstrated in operations in Puerto Rico and Puerto Lleras municipalities in the department of Meta that showed how the transformation process had been successful. This success is well illustrated by the hard strikes against the FARC’s oriental block, who were one of the most powerful in the terrorist group. The FARC did not achieve a new structure to answer the Army’s new capabilities and never

again risked defeats such as in Las Delicias or Patascoy. These new capacities forced the terrorists to revert to low profile operations to avoid failures as experienced in these two operations. The increased mobility, firepower and troop professionalism resulted in the containment of the narco-terrorist threat.

### Operation Jaque (Check)

The Jaque Operation is the most overwhelming example of how successful modernization within the Colombian Army achieved political-strategic effect. Executed on 2 July 2008, Operation Jaque fulfilled, in detail and precision, all the stages of a textbook mission: conception, planning, and execution. The conception was sheer boldness: To enter the enemy's heart, snatch their "trophies" and return unscathed.

Entailing extreme risk, the operation demanded detailed and scrupulous planning within an environment of utmost secrecy. All those who had a role to fulfill had to study it, practice it and review it until being sure their action would be that of an expert. This meant effort, sacrifice and determination to acquire confidence in themselves for the moment of truth. After strict planning and a hard isolation, the execution was performed as it was conceived, boasting precision, coordination, and professionalism. The military forces involved achieved the liberation of 15 hostages from FARC captivity.<sup>28</sup>

Operation Jaque was an action where Colombian Army personnel managed to infiltrate the first-line FARC ranks led by "Cesar", the same team that had kept a large number of kidnap victims in their power. The FARC terrorists were tricked into believing that the hostages were being relocated, but they were in fact being rescued by a fictitious humanitarian organization. It was also coordinated by "Cesar" himself, who personally traveled with the kidnapped victims so he could deliver them to the FARC's leader, Alfonso Cano. The helicopters, which in fact were from the Colombian Army and



manned by highly trained military personnel from Army Intelligence, picked up the kidnap victims in the vicinity of the Department of Guaviare. Operation Jaque was an action without any precedents and it will go down in history because of its audacity and success, and it certainly highlights the quality and professionalism of the Colombian Armed Forces. Fifteen kidnap victims were rescued without firing a single shot.<sup>29</sup>

Operation Jaque represents “the coming of age” of the new Colombian Army. All the resources invested—time, means, training, intelligence—were well spent to liberate the kidnapped to whom the FARC considered their main currency for exchange, and in inflicting humiliation and loss of status among the narco-terrorist. Words will never be enough to praise the value and determination of the officers, non-commissioned officers and civilians of the Army military intelligence, as well as that of the helicopter pilots involved in the operation.

#### Defense Policy and Democratic Security

The start of Alvaro Uribe Velez administration (2002 - 2006) marked a clear separation in overcoming the problem at the national level. For the first time in 20 years, security was identified as the main aspect of public agenda and as the main purpose of government policies. The plan of President Uribe “Hacia un Estado Comunitario” (“Toward a Community State”), included a priority to provide democratic security, while in previous plans there was not even a chapter about the subject of security and defense. Therefore, it was clear, as the government political will of Colombians could not surrender before the terrorist threat. The key concept here was solidarity. Solidarity between citizens and solidarity with the Public Force.<sup>30</sup> Also the solidarity from other countries was required, especially those from the region, to stop terrorism and its associated narco- traffic. As president Uribe stated: “We have to freeze its accounts,

follow their men, and deliver them to justice. I have said it repeatedly: who makes the decision of harboring terrorism ends being a victim of terrorism. To defeat terrorism there is no nation's sovereignty but democratic sovereignty. The struggle is of sovereignty of the States and the democratic nations against the sovereignty of terrorism. The struggle is of all against terrorism."<sup>31</sup> Efficacy with transparency was required; efficacy that is measured in the observation of Human Rights. Efficacy within transparency and the compliance of judicial order is the foundation in which we always work.

The general objective of the defense policy and democratic security is to reinforce and guarantee the rule of law in all the territory, through the strengthening of democratic authority, the free exercise of all institutions' authority, the rule of law and the active participation of the citizens in common interest affairs. As it has been reached with a wealth of skills, the results are strong in this sense. The strengthening of the rule of law is the necessary condition to fulfill the purpose of democratic security: the protection of all Colombians, as the political constitution dictates. If the rule of law governs fully, citizen rights and liberties will be protected; and to the extent the citizen feels protected, the citizen's participation in security will strengthen with a new and renovated vigor.<sup>32</sup>

As was stated above, the only alternative to reach the national objectives was in defeating terrorism. Today there are valid elements that foresee its definitive defeat, based on the analysis of confluent elements of a clear victory: political will to reach it (defense policy and democratic security), support and confidence of the Colombian people in the military capacity and force correlation in favor of the State. The

international attitude to combat terrorism today places Colombia in an important position vis-a-vis the destabilizing agents. Governments, including neighboring countries, know for sure they can be vulnerable. Joaquin Villalobos has drawn attention about the importance of attending to the phenomenon to avoid suffering later the same rigors of the threat to which Colombians were submitted. To consider equivocally that terrorism only affects the country suffering it, may contribute to the advance of a crime that is clearly international; slowly but firmly other regions may be incubating cells that in the future will go against its habitants.

The defeat of terrorism is happening thanks to the strengthening of intelligence services and resultant improvements in understanding terrorism organization, strategies, tactics and leadership. These intelligence advances are made possible the successful execution of Operation Jaque.

Terrorism is being defeated because its immediate objectives were unsuccessful; there was never any FARC intention of liberating the kidnapped, they were searching at any cost for breathing space to regroup and rearm. Terrorist initiatives were neutralized successfully through offensive action and diminishing narco economic infrastructure. State emphasis was maintained on the protection of civil population and their resources. The finances gained from kidnapping and extortion were decimated, as were armaments and explosives acquisition.

Terrorism is being defeated because communication means, especially in a democratic society as ours with a free press, no longer publicizes the FARC message. The narco-terrorist groups have lost the population's attention and the resulting capacity

to influence the government. Today they are only a product of international shame and discredit.

Terrorism is being defeated because its organizational structure is weakening, and is subject to principles that undermine their armed capabilities. The Colombian Army is moving toward a psychological break as the military reputation of the FARC continues to crumble. Terrorism is being defeated because its operative capacity has weakened; today the FARC is incapable of executing an attack of any magnitude. Since 2001, they have demonstrated criminal incompetence to manage kidnapping operations, their command and control chain has been weakened, and the secretariat does not control vital political affairs. Therefore, the strategic balance has changed, and the FARC must negotiate from a weakened position. Likewise, it has been recognized that the death in combat of the two maximum leaders of this terrorist organization, Raúl Reyes and Mono Jojoy, constitute the hardest political and strategic strike the FARC has sustained; the myth the secretariat is invulnerable is now broken.

Terrorism is being defeated because the Colombian Army is a legitimate military force, modern and professional, whose transformation yielded one of the best forces in the world at its level. There is no better way of defeating terrorism than through the strengthening of State legitimacy. This is the prime factor that permits the terrorist's isolation from the social base, as well as the legitimate use of force by the State.

In summary, the FARC is weakened as a result of the success of a transformation process that strengthens and consolidates the will the government expressed in its democratic security policy. The balance is clearly favorable to the institutions that ensure a peaceful existence. The main indicators of that weakening in

the last five years may be summarized in the loss of more than the 50% of narco-terrorist armed men, diminishing their manpower to less than 10,000 since 2002.<sup>33</sup> Simultaneously their recruitment capacity has also been affected. Their finances have been hit, despite their total dedication to narco-traffic; “Negro Acacio’s” neutralization meant an enormous loss of their incomes from drugs. Their annual kidnapping numbers have also decreased, while the loss of their territorial presence and mobility has decreased their extortion capacity.

Terrorism is being defeated because their middlemen have been beaten down or captured. Their losses have weakened their morale and significantly diminished their political, organizational, financial and military capacities. Their communications are practically neutralized, deteriorating the command and control capacity of their commandants. It is said that their morale is at the lowest point in their history. With military and financial power weakening, desertions avalanche; the falling of important chiefs and the massive popular rejection of past demonstrations will continue to weaken their morale and their motivation to continue with the struggle. Time is now against the FARC. Their weakening will be progressive and irreversible, and while they are weaker they will achieve less during negotiations with the State.

### Conclusions

Clarifying that these observations are not a manual for military triumph, the Colombian Army’s transformation process employed sufficient elements that well demonstrate how institutional modernization, centered on manpower, professionalization and equipment modernization, proved fundamental for the achievements that can today be presented on an international level. The American Strategic Studies Center has cited Colombia as the best example of how to overcome a

crisis to achieve strategic advantages over insurgent enemies.<sup>34</sup> If we perform a correlation about the theory that defines military transformation and what happened inside the Colombian Army, then we can affirm that the model permitted the advance to unsuspected horizons in the objective the country pursues in war for peace.<sup>35</sup>

The transformation process resulted as a consequence of the serious crisis unleashed by the FARC's offensive in the period of 1996 –1998, during which time Colombia suffered defeats big enough to lead analysts and the general public to voice the opinion that the war was being lost. After the modernization processes, the institution improved each of the functional capacities and structures, especially the mental attitude, leadership, and doctrine, looking for efficiency and effectiveness in the planning and conduct of military operations. All the efforts bore fruit; the enemy's offensive was contained, and the government's legitimacy was retrieved to ensure triumph over armed insurgency.

It is important to highlight that the Army was the leader of a process that was then extended to other national organizations; therefore, it is now the duty of the State and the society to embrace this process and support it definitively, what is at stake is the nation's stability and its democratic institutions.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 24.

<sup>2</sup> James D Henderson, *La Modernizacion en Colombia: Los años de Laureano Gomez, 1889-1965* (Modernization in Colombia: Laureano Gomez years, 1889-1965) (Medellin: Universidad de Antioquia, 2006), 589. Plan Laso, first effort of the Colombian State to face this challenge included a military component with political and social elements. Its integral character is recognized after General Ruiz Novoa, War Ministry, criticized the government for the military component not being complemented with social and economic policies, this earned him his dismissal, for alleged meddling in political affairs.

<sup>3</sup> Francisco Leal Buitrago, *La Inseguridad de la Seguridad. Colombia 1958-2005* (The Insecurity of Security. Colombia 1958-2005) (Bogota: Editorial Planeta, 2006), 37.

<sup>4</sup> It was analyzed this way in different national and military intelligence reports.

<sup>5</sup> Gonzalo Sanchez, *Violencias y Estrategias Colectivas en la Region Andina; Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru y Venezuela* (Violence and Collectives Strategies in the Andean region: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru y Venezuela) (Bogota: IFEA Instituto Frances de Estudios Andinos, 2004), 124.

<sup>6</sup> Alfredo Rangel, *Las FARC, Una Mirada Actual. Reconocer la guerra para construir la paz* ( FARC, A Current View, Recognize War for Peace Building) (Bogota: Maria Victoria Llorente, 2007), 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 33

<sup>8</sup> Conference given to the students and faculty from the Command and General Staff College, Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth. KS.

<sup>9</sup> Gallup Poll, March 2010, Bogota, Colombia. The Colombian Army has the support of most of the civil population, which sees us as the higher credibility and favorability institution; the last survey demonstrates so (82%). The people are on our side and reject unanimously even in massive demonstrations the methods used by the guerrillas. The external support is weakening increasingly more, therefore a revolutionary leadership does not exist that may act as catalyst for the violence “a fair cause is not promoted through violent methods”.

<sup>10</sup> L Sergio Germani and D R Kaarthikeyan, ed., *Pathways out of terrorism and insurgency: The dynamic of Terrorist Violence and Peace Processes* (Elgin: New Dawn Press, 2005), 318.

<sup>11</sup> Gallup Poll, September 2008, Bogota, Colombia.

<sup>12</sup> Rafael Pardo Rueda, *La Historia de las Guerras* (The History of Wars) (Bogota: Ediciones B – Grupo Zeta, 2008), 534.

<sup>13</sup> *El Tiempo* (Bogota), 5 March 1998.

<sup>14</sup> *El Tiempo* (Bogota), 8 March 1998. .

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Rafael Pardo Rueda, *La Historia de las Guerras* (The History of Wars) (Bogota: Ediciones B – Grupo Zeta, 2008), 542.

<sup>17</sup> *El Tiempo* (Bogota), 9 March 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> In fact the slogan “we are in a war and we are wining it” was established, battle cry of the new Military Forces. The new military leadership in *El Tiempo*, August 9 1998

<sup>20</sup> *El Tiempo* (Bogota), 9 August 1998.

<sup>21</sup> *El Tiempo* (Bogota), 6 March 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Gordon R. Sullivan, Michael V. Harper, *Hop is not a Method: what business leaders can learn from America's Army* (New York: Time Business, 1996), 107.

<sup>23</sup> Army Strategic Concept, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Nelson E. Hernandez Diaz, Salvadorian Army, *El Poder Aereo en el Conflicto Salvadoreño*, (Air Power in the Salvadorian Conflict), *Air Power Journal* (July 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Gallup Poll, July 2009, Bogota, Colombia. Ministerio de Defensa Nacional. Direccion de Derechos Humanos.

<sup>28</sup> Juan Carlos Torres, *Operacion Jaque: La Verdadera Historia*. ( Check Operation: The True History) (Bogota: Editorial Planeta, 2009), 133.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>30</sup> This principle, essential in the text of our Political Constitution, is fundamental for connivance, for the growing consolidation in the deep integration of the Colombian people. The population's massive answer to cooperation within the institutional frame has demonstrated the determination of Colombian people to end with terrorism.

<sup>31</sup> Challenges of the Defense Policy and Democratic Security, President Alvaro Uribe Velez, Colombian Army War College Auditorium, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Security is not understood in a first instance as the State's security, nor as the citizen security and of democracy without the intervention of the State, but as the citizen's protection and of the democracy by the State, with the solidarity cooperation and the commitment of all the society.

<sup>33</sup> Francisco Leal Buitrago, ed., *En la Encrucijada, Colombia en el siglo XXI* (At the Crossroads, Colombia in the XXI Century) (Bogota, Editorial Norma, 2006), 347.

<sup>34</sup> Gabriel Marcella, *Democratic Governance and The Rule of Law, Lessons from Colombia*, Strategic Studies Institute (Carlisle: PKSOL papers, 2009), 34.

<sup>35</sup> In his article, "From Cavalry to Computer; The Pattern of Military Revolutions," Andrew Krepinevich, an expert on military transformation, points out that this happens when new technologies are applied to a high number of military systems, combined with innovative operative concepts and organization adaptations to alter the conflict character and conduct.